J. Sharp

A

Perſwaſive to Prayer:

A

SERMON,

Preach'd by the

Archbiſhop of *YORK*,

Before the

KING,

At St. JAMES's, *March* 13. 169$\frac{7}{8}$.

A

Preface to Prayer:

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SERMON,

Preach'd by the

Archbishop of YORK,

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At St. JAMES's, March 13. 169⅝

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MARCH 13. 169⅞.

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By the moſt Reverend Father in GOD,

JOHN Lord Archbiſhop of YORK.

LONDON,

Printed by *J. Matthews*, for *Walter Kettilby*, at the *Biſhop's Head* in St. *Paul's* Church-Yard, MDCC.

Price ſtitch'd, Three Pence.

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LUKE xviii. 1.

And he ſpake a Parable unto them, to this end, That men ought always to pray, and not to faint.

THE Parable which our Saviour ſpake unto them to this end was this; *There was in a City a Judge, who feared not God nor regarded Men, and there was a Widow in that City, and ſhe came to him ſaying, Avenge me of my Adverſary. And he*

would not for a while: But afterwards he ſaid within himſelf, Though I fear not God, nor regard Man; Yet becauſe this Widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, leſt by her continual coming ſhe weary me.

The Application of this Parable is eaſie and natural. If a Man that neither *fears God*, nor *regards Men*; hath neither Senſe of Religion nor Humanity; may be ſuppoſed to be ſo far prevail'd upon by the earneſt Prayer of a miſerable neceſſitous Perſon, as to grant the Requeſt made to him, and to adminiſter Relief to the Supplicant, merely upon account of the Continuance, and Importunity of the Petitions that are put up: Then how much more ought we to think that God, who is Infinite Goodneſs it ſelf; who is always kind and bountiful to his Creatures; who delights to do good to them, even without their ſeeking and deſiring it; and who is ſo far from being at any Pains or Trouble for the ſupplying their Wants, that it is altogether as eaſie to him to do, what is requeſted of him, as not to do it: I ſay, How much more ought we to think that this God, upon our earneſt and hearty *Prayer* to him for any thing we ſtand in need of, will return us a kind Anſwer, and grant us ſuch Supplies as are proper for us? But then we are to remember, that we *Pray always, and faint not.* We muſt be diligent, and importunate, and perſevering

perſevering in our Devotions, otherwiſe we are not to expect any more favourable return of them, than the Judge in the Parable made to the Widow upon her once or twice putting up her Petitions to him.

This is the Effect of the Parable. I mean not now farther to inſiſt on it, but to ſtick to that point for the ſake of which our Saviour framed it. *Jeſus ſpake a Parable unto them to this end, That men ought always to pray, and not to faint.*

But what is meant by *praying always*, and *not fainting*, which our Lord here obliges us to? Is it to be always on our knees, and to mind no other buſineſs but Devotion? So indeed (they ſay) ſome of ancient times expounded it; but we meet with them no where, but in the Catalogues of the Hereticks. No certainly, *to pray always, and not to faint*, doth imply a quite different thing, of which I ſhall give an account in the following particulars.

Firſt, Theſe words import, that we ſhould be always in a *praying Temper*, in ſuch a Diſpoſition of mind, that we always carry about us, and have within us the neceſſary Requiſites of hearty Prayer; that is to ſay, a firm Belief of God and his Providence, a lively Senſe of our own Sinfullneſs, and Weakneſs, and manifold Neceſſities; and an entire, humble, conſtant Dependence upon the Divine Goodneſs for the Supply of them. In ſuch a

Frame of Soul as this, I take, That *Spirit of Prayer and Supplication*, mentioned in the Scriptures, to conſiſt.

Secondly, *To pray always*, likewiſe imports, that upon every ſolemn Occaſion we ſhould *actually* addreſs our ſelves to God: ſeeking help from him in all the ſtraits and difficulties we happen into; rendring our acknowledgments for every Good that arrives to us in our lives; and imploring his Protection, his Guidance, his Bleſſing upon us, in every Work of Moment that we go about.

Thirdly, It imports farther that we ſhould at leaſt twice every day, either in publick, or in private, offer up the Sacrifice of *Prayer* and *Praiſe* in a ſolemn manner unto God. Leſs than this (I think) this Phraſe of *Praying always*, as likewiſe that other Expreſſion of St. *Paul*, that we ſhould *pray without ceaſing*: leſs than this, I ſay, they cannot ſignifie; but how much more I now enquire not. It is indeed very probable, as Interpreters have noted, that theſe Expreſſions are borrowed from, and have reſpect to the *daily Sacrifices* among the *Jews*. Every day twice (that is to ſay, in the Morning, and in the Evening) by the Appointment of God, was offer'd up a Sacrifice in the Temple; to which the Devout People reſorted: Which Sacrifice is in Scripture called by the Name of the *continual Sacrifice*, the *daily Sacrifice*; the *never-ceaſing Sacrifice*; and this in Contra-diſtinction

1 *Theſſ.* v. 17.

on to the *occaſional* Sacrifices which pious Perſons uſed to bring thither. If now this be a true account of theſe Expreſſions, we cannot be ſaid *to pray always*, *to pray without ceaſing*, *to pray continually*, unleſs we do at leaſt *twice* every day, in the Morning, and in the Evening offer up our ſolemn *Sacrifice* of *Prayer* to God.

But *Fourthly*, *To pray always, and not to faint*, Implies great *Earneſtneſs* and *Importunity* in our Prayers. It imports that we ſhould not *faintly* Addreſs to God, but with Affection and Fervour; with a deep Sence of our Sins, and of our Wants; and a ſerious and fixed Attention to what we are about; and with very ardent deſires, and *hungring* and *thirſting* after that *Grace*, or that *Pardon*, or that *Bleſſing* that we pray for. And this is that kind of Prayer which St. *James* ſtyles *the effectual fervent Prayer of a Righteous man*, which, he ſaith, *availeth much*. Ch. v. 16.

Laſtly, *To pray always*, *and not to faint*, imports *Continuance* and *Perſeverance* in our Prayers. That we do not pray by Fits and Starts, and then intermit our Devotion; but conſtantly keep up the Fervour of our Minds towards God: Not giving over our Prayers, tho' we have not a Return of them ſo ſoon as we expect; But *continuing inſtant in Prayer*, as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, and *watching thereunto with all perſeverance*. Rom. 12. 12. Eph. 6. 18.

Theſe

Theſe are the chief things which are comprized in this Command of our Saviour. Now to recommend the Practice hereof to you, and to offer ſome Arguments to perſwade every one thus *to pray always, and not to faint*, is that which I deſign in the remaining part of this Diſcourſe.

I do not know how it comes to paſs, that Men have generally ſo great an Averſion to this Duty of *Prayer*. They are very hardly got to it. They are glad of any Pretence in the World to be excuſed from it. And when they do come to perform their Devotions, (which among many is not oftner than the Laws or Cuſtoms of the Countrey oblige them to) how ſoon are they weary of them! How little do they attend to the Buſineſs they are about! As if indeed *Prayer* was one of the greateſt Burdens that God could lay upon Human Nature. Whereas in truth, if our Luſts and Paſſions were out of the way, and Men could be brought to give themſelves the Liberty of conſidering things equally; we ſhould be convinced that there is no Work that a Man can apply himſelf to; no Action that he can perform, to which there are greater Invitations, greater Motives; nay, I was going to ſay, greater *Temptations* of all ſorts, than to this of Prayer.

Suppoſe one would ſet himſelf to perſwade any of us to the Practice of ſome particular thing

thing which he hath a Mind to recommend to us; what more effectual Method could he take for the carrying of his Point, than to lay before us the common Heads of Arguments, by which all Mankind are prevailed upon to undertake any Buſineſs or Action? And then to convince us, that the thing he would perſwade us to, is recommendable upon all theſe accounts. As for inſtance, That it is a thing *fit*, and *decent*, and *reaſonable* to be done. Nay, 'tis a thing we are oblig'd in *duty* to do, even ſo far oblig'd, that we act againſt our *Natures*, if we do it not. Nor have we any juſt Exception againſt it. It is the moſt *eaſie* thing in the World. It will put us to no manner of *Trouble*, or *Pains*, or *Self-Denial*. So far from that, that it is very *pleaſant* and *delightful*. And not only ſo, but alſo highly *creditable* and *honourable*. And, which is the Top of all, the *Benefits* and *Advantages* we ſhall receive from it are extremely great in all reſpects. If now, I ſay, a Man can make all theſe things good of the Point he would perſwade us to; ſure all the World muſt account us out of our Wits, if we do not follow his Advice.

Yet all theſe things, it may be evidently made to appear, are true of *Prayer*, and that too in a higher degree than of moſt things in the World. What therefore can be deſired in this Exerciſe to recommend the Practice thereof to us that it hath not? And

what

what muſt be concluded of us, if, notwithſtanding all this, we continue obſtinate in our Neglects of it? Give me leave to ſpeak a little to theſe ſeveral Particulars.

Firſt of all; Doth it recommend any thing to our Practice that it is *fit*, and *decent*, and *reaſonable* to be done? Then certainly we muſt needs think our ſelves obliged to the conſtant Practice of this Point we are ſpeaking of. For there is nothing that doth more become us; nor is any thing more *undecent*, or more *unreaſonable* than the Neglect of it.

Is it not fit that the Sovereign Lord of us, and of the World ſhould be acknowledged by us? That we who, do continually depend upon him, ſhould ever and anon be looking up to him, and expreſſing that Dependence? Is it not fit that we, who every moment experience a thouſand Inſtances of his Kindneſs, partake of a thouſand Mercies and Favours of his, and muſt periſh the next Minute unleſs they be continued to us; Is it not highly *fit* and *reaſonable* (I ſay) that we ſhould take notice at leaſt of theſe things to this our Benefactor?

We ſhould think it very ill Manners to paſs by our *Prince*, or even any of our *Betters*, without *ſaluting* them, or ſome way or other teſtifying our Reſpect to them, tho' they had no way particularly obliged us: But if we were beholding to them for our daily Bread; to come into their Preſence without

without taking notice of them, or their Bounty to us, would be intolerable. How much more intolerable therefore muſt it be, to paſs by God Almighty day after day; nay, to be in his Preſence continually, (as indeed we always are) and yet neither to pay any *Homage* or *Reverence* to him, as He is our Supreme *Lord*, nor to make any Acknowledgments, as He is our daily *Preſerver* and *Benefactor*.

If we had any ſenſe of Ingenuity, we ſhould bluſh to think of paſſing a Day without ſeveral times lifting up our Minds, and doing our Reſpects to Almighty God, tho' there was no other ill in the Neglect, than only the horrible Rudeneſs and ill Manners that it diſcovers in us.

But, *Secondly*; The conſtant Exerciſe of *Prayer* is not only recommended to us under the notion of a very *decent* and *reaſonable* thing, but as an indiſpenſable *Duty*. God Almighty hath moſt ſtrictly charged it upon us, and we are Tranſgreſſors of his Laws if we do not practiſe it.

Nature it ſelf ſpeaks ſufficiently plain in this matter. And where-ever God hath to the *Law of Nature* ſuper-added any *Revelation* of his *Will*, this Duty we are ſpeaking of fails not to make up a conſiderable part of it. It would be endleſs to mention all that is ſaid upon this Head by our Lord and his Apoſtles in the new Teſtament. I have told you already

ready that they oblige us to no leſs than Praying *always*; Praying *without ceaſing*. They uſe likewiſe abundance of other Expreſſions to the like purpoſe. They bid us, *every where to lift up holy hands. In every thing to make our Supplications known unto God. To pray in the Spirit with all Prayer and Supplication, and and to watch thereunto with all perſeverance.*

If it be ſaid there is no ſuch expreſs command for *Prayer* in that *Revelation* which was made to the *Jews*; I anſwer, It is a great Miſtake. The *Prophets* do over and over again injoin it as the Principal Part of the Worſhip of God. And thoſe that live without *Praying*, are by thoſe Inſpired Writers rank'd among the *Atheiſts*. And as for the *Law* of *Moſes* it ſelf, it is obvious to obſerve, that the greateſt part of it is concerning *Sacrifices*. Now *Sacrifices*, if we will underſtand them right, were nothing elſe but that Form or Method of putting up *Prayers* to God, that was in thoſe times uſed in the World. So that, in truth, ſo far was *Prayer* from being left as a Matter of Indifferency to the *Jews*, that moſt of their Religion conſiſted in it.

Pſalm. 53. 1, 4.

And accordingly all the Devout Men of that Church ſpent much of their Time in this Exerciſe. *David*'s manner was to pray ſeven times a Day. And *Daniel* took himſelf to be ſo much obliged to the frequent Practice of this Duty; that rather than break his Cuſtom of performing his *Solemn Devotions* three

three times a day, he would expoſe himſelf to the Den of Lyons.

Nay, *Thirdly*; So great is our obligation to frequent *Prayer*, that he acts againſt his *Nature* whoſoever doth not practiſe it. For, in truth, *Prayer* is the *proper* and *peculiar* Duty of Man, as he is a *Man*.

That which conſtitutes the nature of *Man*, and doth *formally* difference, and diſtinguiſh him from all other *Animals*, is, not ſo much the power of *Reaſon*, as the capacity of being *Religious*. There are ſome Foot-ſteps of an obſcure *Reaſon* to be obſerved in many Creatures beſides *Man*; But in none, except *Him*, is there found any ſenſe of a *Deity*, or Diſpoſition towards *Religion*, or any thing that looks like it. That ſeems to be the Prerogative of Mankind. God endowed them, and them only with Spirits capable of Reflecting upon the Author of their Beings, and of making acknowledgments and performing Religious Worſhip to him.

So that to Worſhip God, to converſe with him in the exerciſe of Devotion, to Pray, and give Thanks for his Benefits, may be truly ſaid to be the proper Office of a Man, as *Man*; The natural exerciſe of thoſe Faculties that diſtinguiſh him from *brute* Creatures. And conſequently, thoſe that live in a continual neglect of this, what muſt be ſaid of them, but that they act unſuitably to their Natures, and are degenerated into a ſort of *Bruriſhneſs*?

It

It appears then, that our *Obligations* to this Duty are many and great, and ſuch as there is no poſſibility of evading. But here is our unhappineſs, that thoſe Duties which we are moſt ſtrictly obliged to, are not thoſe that we are always moſt inclined to practiſe. There may be ſomething in the moſt indiſpenſable Duties ſo *harſh* and *unpleaſant*; ſo diſagreeing with our other Appetites or Intereſts; They may be ſo *hard* to be performed; ſo *Laborious*, or ſo *Expenſive*, or upon ſome other account ſo *ungrateſull*, that we ſhall naturally put our ſelves upon the finding out Excuſes for the ridding our hands of them, and eaſily ſatisfy our minds for ſo doing.

But now, which I deſire in the *Fourth* place to be conſidered, There are none of theſe pretences to be made againſt this Duty of *Prayer*; none of theſe Inconveniencies do attend it. But it is ſo *naturally*, ſo *eaſily* performed; and ſo *inoffenſively* to all our other *Appetites* and *Intereſts*; That one would think, nothing but mere lazineſs, or ſtupidity, could hinder a Man from the daily Exerciſe of it.

It requires no great *Parts*, or *Learning*, or *Study* for the diſcharging it. The meaneſt *Capacity*, the moſt un-improved *Underſtanding*, if there be but an honeſt *Heart*, may perform it as well as the learnedeſt Man in the World.

It requires no *Labour* or *Toil*. The feebleſt and moſt diſ-ſpirited Body that can but lift up eyes to Heaven, and direct wiſhes thither, doth

it as effectually, as the moſt vigorous Conſtitution.

It doth not go againſt the *grain* of any natural Inclination; nor put the body to any *pain* or *hardſhip*. Nor doth it contradict any appetite or affection that Nature hath implanted in us. No Humour, but either the *Sottiſh* or the *Malicious*; the *Brutiſh* or the *Deviliſh* is diſtaſted by it.

It puts us to no *Charge* or *Expence* in the World, ſave that of our *Thoughts*; yet that is the nobleſt way of ſpending them: And if they be not employed thus, it is ten to one but they will be employed much worſe.

It is not at all conſumptive of our *Time*. For we may attend this work, when we are a doing other buſineſs; and there is no man ſo full of buſineſs, but he hath abundance of vacant ſpaces, which he will not know how to fill up to any good purpoſe, unleſs he hath learned this Art of ſaving Time.

In a word, there is no Objection againſt it, it is one of the *Eaſieſt*, *Naturaleſt*, *Inoffenſiveſt* Duties in the World; Nay, ſo *eaſie* it is, that the moſt Selfiſh Man, if he was to make his own Terms with God Almighty, could not deſire to obtain the Bleſſings he ſtands in need of, upon eaſier. If all the Mercies and Benefits we do daily and hourly need, and conſequently muſt expect and wiſh for; I ſay, if they be not worth asking at the Hands of God, or returning thanks for them after he has beſtowed them; they are worth nothing.

But beſides the *unexceptionableneſs* and *eaſineſs* of this Duty, it is alſo, in the *Fifth* place, the moſt *pleaſant* and *delightfull* Exerciſe in the World. It is true, *vitious* Men will not eaſily think ſo, but look upon it as a dry inſipid Employment; but ſo would the very *Beatifical Viſion* of God, and all the Exerciſes of Glorified Souls in Heaven appear to ſuch Men. But they are not competent Judges of Matters of this Nature, having neither Experience of them, nor Diſpoſition towards them. Thoſe only can form right Notions of theſe ſpiritual Exerciſes, who have a good ſenſe and reliſh of God upon their Minds, and have uſed and accuſtomed themſelves to Devotion. Now to all ſuch I appeal, whether the *Delights*, and *Satisfaction*, and *Conſolation* that they receive from converſing with God, and a hearty pouring out their Souls unto him, be not inexpreſſible? whether they do not find more *Joy*, and *Peace*, and *Comfort* in their attendance upon God's ſervice, either in *publick*, or *private*, than ever they did from the Pleaſures and Gratifications of any of their outward ſenſes.

So much as the *Soul* is more pure and excellent than the *Body*; ſo much are the *Pleaſures* and *Gratifications* of that, more exquiſitely delicious than thoſe that ariſe from *Corporeal* Objects. But of all the Pleaſures of the Soul, thoſe that it receiveth from the Communications of God to it, in the Exerciſe of Devotion, are incomparably the higheſt, and moſt affecting. We

may

may talk of *Pleaſures* and *Enjoyments*, but no Man ever truly found them, till he became acquainted with God, and was made ſenſible of his Love, and partaker of his Spiritual Favours, and lived in an entire Friendſhip and Communion with him; which Friendſhip and Communion is chiefly, if not only, both expreſſed, and maintained, by *Prayer* and other Exerciſes of Devotion.

Add to this in the *Sixth* place, that Prayer is not only the moſt *delightful* Employment, but the moſt *Creditable* and *Honourable* that our Natures are capable of. We account it, and very juſtly, a mighty Priviledge and Dignity to be known to Princes and great Men; To have their Ear, and to enjoy the Liberty of acceſs to them at all times: But what is this to the *Honour* and *Dignity* we receive, in having leave given us at all times, to approach into the Preſence of the King of the World?

That we, poor ſinfull *duſt* and *aſhes*, ſhould be permitted to ſpeak to ſo tranſcendent a Majeſty! Nay, ſhould have free Liberty given us to converſe with him as with a Friend! To open all our wants, to acquaint him with all our concernments, to make known every thought of our Hearts, and every affair of our Lives to him! Nay, and to be aſſured that he will be ſo far from taking amiſs this boldneſs in us, that he will favourably accept all our Applications, and make as kind returns as we our ſelves can wiſh or deſire! What greater Honour are we capa-

ble of than this? O therefore, how far are they ſunk below all the *Ambition* of humane Nature, that will not take all opportunities of thus Honouring and doing Credit to themſelves by the Exerciſe of Devotion!

But ſo ſelfiſh are the Spirits and Tempers of many of us, that nothing will work upon them, but the conſideration of *Gain*, and *Profit*, and *Advantage*: Let us ſee therefore what of this kind we may promiſe to our ſelves from *Prayer*, which is my *Seventh* and laſt conſideration.

And let the point be put upon this Iſſue. Let all that has hitherto been ſaid for the recommending of *Prayer* go for nothing. If it do not appear, that it is as *profitable* and *gainful* an exerciſe, as it is *reaſonable* and *due*; as it is *eaſie* and *pleaſant*, and *honourable*: Let no Man trouble himſelf about it, but throw off all thoughts of it for ever.

But in this reſpect alſo the Motives to *Prayer* are infinite. No Man can number the *Benefits* and *Advantages* that do accrue to us from it. I can here but only touch upon a few of the many. *Prayer* is the moſt proper means to *ennoble*, and *refine*, and *ſpiritualize* our Natures. Were it not for this, it would be impoſſible to preſerve our Souls aloft, in the midſt of ſuch a heap of earthly Rubbiſh with which they are overwhelmed. Our daily converſe with material objects would make us wholly *ſenſual*, and the *Spirit* would, in a manner, be loſt in the *Fleſh*. And ſo it doth really fare with all thoſe that live

live without Devotion towards God. However they may retain ſo much worldly prudence, as to enable them to govern their Temporal Affairs to their Advantage; yet their Souls do perfectly grovel upon the Earth. They are utterly devoid of the Spiritual Life. They have no more ſenſe of the Nobleſt and beſt things, which it is the perfection of their Faculties to be employed about; than a *blind* Man hath of *Colours*. Into this dull ſtate ſhall we all ſink, if we do not take care to maintain a conſtant Devotion towards God; for it is by That, that the ſenſe of Goodneſs is kept alive in us. It is That that raiſes us above this World, and preſerves our Minds from the Defilements of the Earth, which, by their continual mingling with material things, they would otherwiſe neceſſarily contract.

But further, *Prayer* doth not only tend to the bettering the Conſtitution of our *Minds*; But the Benefits and good Influences of it do extend alſo to all the affairs and actions of our *Lives*. No body can tell, but he that hath tryed, how much devout and affectionate *Prayer* doth diſpoſe a Man to go about his buſineſs in the World. So far is this Exerciſe from hindring our Employments, as is commonly pretended, that in truth it is a great furtherance to them.

Beſides; It is the beſt Antidote in the World againſt all diſappointments and vexations that we can meet with; Againſt every ungratefull and diſpleaſing Accident that comes upon us in the courſe of our Lives. He that converſeth much

with God, and uſeth to make all his concernments known to him, is prepared to bear all things patiently, and evenly, whatſoever happen, nor can he light into any circumſtances of Life, which will not be, not only *ſupportable* to him, but *eaſie* alſo.

Add to this in the laſt place, that it is *Prayer* that ſecures the Bleſſing of God, both upon our *Perſons* and upon our *Labours*; Upon our *Baſket* and *Store*; Upon our *Families*; Upon our *Employments*; And upon all that we have, or do. So great is the Vertue of *Prayer*, that it turns all the Actions of our *natural* or *civil* Life, however indifferent they be, into Actions of *Religion*. And every thing that we have, or comes to us, is thereby made a *Bleſſing* of God, which without it perhaps might have been a *Croſs* and an *Affliction*. It is Prayer by which every *Thing*, and every *Action* is ſanctified to Believers.

I might name ſeveral other Benefits and Advantages to be reap'd from the conſcientious Practice of this Duty; But thoſe that I have mention'd, may (I think) if they be conſidered, be ſufficient to recommend it to any Man whatſoever, that hath the leaſt Kindneſs for himſelf: And therefore I will not burthen your Memories with heaping up more Motives. Only one thing I deſire leave to preſs a little more earneſtly, and particularly, than I have yet done, and that is, *The Abſolute Neceſſity of Conſtant Prayer, in order to a Holy and Vertuous Life.*

Do any of you here preſent in good earneſt mean to *live* as you ſhould do? Do you really intend or deſire to endeavour after ſuch a Pitch of *Vertue* and *Holineſs*, as will be available for the ſaving your Souls everlaſtingly? If you do not, 'tis in vain to attempt the perſwading you to any thing of this Nature. If you do; then give me leave to tell you, that it is abſolutely neceſſary that you ſhould live in the conſtant Exerciſe of *Prayer*, otherwiſe you will never do your Buſineſs. And on the other ſide, I dare aſſure you, if you do thus practiſe, you will not fail of attaining the End you aim at.

Theſe *three* things I dare lay down for Truth in this Matter:

Firſt, It is impoſſible for any Man to be *good*, that lives without conſtant *Praying*.

Secondly, Whoever is *good* at the preſent, yet if he diſuſe himſelf in this Point, he will not continue good long.

And *Laſtly*, Whoever makes a Conſcience of *Praying* frequently and heartily, and continues ſo to do, tho' he cannot at preſent be ſaid to be a *good* Man, yet it is impoſſible for him long to continue *bad*; he will certainly at laſt get the Victory over his Luſts and evil Habits. So that *Prayer* is both the *Means* without which Vertue cannot be attained; And the *Means* that never fails of attaining it; And the *Security* of it when it is attained. Of theſe *three* things very briefly, and I have done.

Firſt, I ſay, No Man can be a *vertuous* Man that lives without *Praying*. I do not deny, that ſome who make no great Conſcience of this Duty, but live in an habitual Neglect of it, may ſo far retain the Notions of *good* and *evil*, and thoſe Notions may to far influence their Actions, as that they ſhall not be *notoriouſly* and *ſcandalouſly* vicious. It may be they will not *lie*, nor *cheat*, nor *oppreſs* any one. It may be they do not live in a Courſe of *Lewdneſs* and *Debauchery*; nor will be engag'd in any Deſign or Action that is apparently baſe or diſhonourable. But all this while, theſe Men are far from being *vertuous* in the Senſe we now ſpeak of. For we ſpeak of ſuch a *Vertue* as recommends us to God; ſuch a *Vertue* as will be effectual for our Salvation in the other World. Now to ſuch a *Vertue* as this, there goes nothing leſs than an Univerſal Care over all our Actions; a Serious Endeavour to frame all our Converſation ſuitably and conformably to the Laws of our Saviour. But how can any Man think he takes Care of this, that knowingly, and willingly, lives in a conſtant Contradiction to one of the principal Duties of our Saviour's Religion?

Our whole Duty is made up but of *Three* Things; That a Man live *ſoberly* with reſpect to himſelf, *righteouſly* with reſpect to his Neighbour, and *piouſly* with reſpect to God. Suppoſing now, that a Man take care of the *two* former, that is, of doing his Duty to himſelf and his Neighbour, (which yet I believe never any

Man

Man did, that made no Conſcience of neglecting his Prayers:) But ſuppoſe a Man could ſatisfie himſelf as to theſe two Points of his Duty; yet if he make no Conſcience of the *third*, that is, of *Piety* towards God, (as no Man can make Conſcience of that, who makes it no matter of Conſcience whether he ſays his Prayers or no) in what Senſe or Notion can this Man be ſaid to have done his Duty, or to lead a vertuous Life? Certainly in no Senſe at all. For as to one *third* part of his Duty, (which is indeed as conſiderable at leaſt, if not more, than either of the other) he is a notorious Tranſgreſſour. And tho' he be not *unjuſt*, tho' he be not *debauched*, yet wanting *Piety* towards God, he is *Impious*; And that will as certainly damn him, as either of the other. Either therefore one of theſe two things muſt be made appear, that is to ſay, that there may be *Vertue*, ſuch *Vertue* as will recommend us to God without *Piety*: Or that there may be *Piety* without ever *Praying*, or worſhipping God, (neither of which I believe will be eaſily affirmed;) Or it will follow, That where there is no *Praying*, there is no *Vertue*, and conſequently no *Salvation*.

But beſides; We all know there is no Poſſibility of Living a Holy and Vertuous Life, (ſuch a Life as our Religion requires of us, and which alone will ſtand us in ſtead in the Day of Judgment) without the Grace of God, and the Aſſiſtances of his Holy Spirit. And we all know likewiſe that theſe are no way to be come

come by, but by earneſt, and affectionate, and conſtant *Prayer*. How therefore is it poſſible, that any Man, who is not very ſerious and frequent in the Exerciſe of Devotion, ſhould ever be able to live a Holy Life? He may indeed, by his own Study, and for his own Intereſt, poſſeſs himſelf of ſuch good Qualities, as may make a fair Shew in the World, and recommend him to all about him: But the inward Principle of Goodneſs and Holineſs he cannot have. Becauſe he doth not practiſe the Means of obtaining the *Grace* and *Spirit* of God, by which alone that Principle is to be wrought in him.

But, *Secondly*, Let a Man at preſent be in a good State of Soul; yet it is impoſſible to preſerve himſelf in that State, without the conſtant Exerciſe of Devotion. If a Man once begin to neglect his Prayers, or to grow more dull and remiſs in them, or more averſe to them, it is a certain Argument that he is in a declining Condition as to Vertue and Goodneſs. And as that *Neglect*, or that *Dulneſs*, or that *Averſion* increaſes, in the ſame Degree doth the Goodneſs of his Condition abate alſo. And when once it is come to that paſs with him, that the Flame of Devotion is quite extinguiſhed in his Heart; ſo that he can live, and enjoy himſelf without any Converſe or Intercourſe with God in Prayer; He may from that Period date the Loſs of his Spiritual Life. He is reduced to the State of a *ſenſual, natural* Man; *Alive*

to

to the World, and to his Luſts, but perfectly *dead* to God.

The plain *Engliſh* is, *Prayer* and Devotion is as neceſſary a Means to preſerve the Union between the Soul and God, in which our *Spiritual* Life conſiſts, as Meat and Drink is, to preſerve the Union between our Souls and Bodies, in which our *natural* Life conſiſts. And we may every whit as reaſonably expect to keep our *Bodies* alive without the conſtant and daily uſe of Eating and Drinking: As we can expect to keep our *Souls* alive to God without the conſtant and daily Exerciſe of Devotion.

This may to ſome appear ſtrange Doctrine; But I do believe I may appeal to experience for the Truth of it. Nay, I dare put the Queſtion to any one, that ever took any ſerious Care of his Soul, and ſincerely endeavoured to live vertuouſly, and to pleaſe God, whether he hath not found the Matter to be ſo as I have repreſented.

Have not ſuch always found, that ſo long as they kept up the Fervour and Vigour of their Devotion, ſo long as they were conſtant and diligent in their Prayers, and other Holy Exerciſes: So long nothing could hurt them. So long they have always maintained their *Poſt*, and rather grown better than worſe. And though they have ſometimes been foully overtaken by ſome Sin that they reſolved againſt, yet that Relapſe hath done them no Miſchief. Their Continuance in their *Prayers* hath been an Antidote

tidote againſt the Malignity of the *Sin*; And they have preſently weather'd it out, and ſuffered no ill Conſequence by it; But it has rather made them more watchful over themſelves, and more careful of their Actions afterward.

But, on the other ſide, have they not always found, that when once they began to abate of the Fervour of their Devotions; when once they began to *pray ſeldomer*, or with more Coldneſs and Indifference; They then began to live more looſely and careleſly; to be more dull and ſluggiſh towards every good Work? Till perhaps by degrees the true Senſe of God and Religion hath been in a great meaſure worn off from their Spirits, and they in a manner have returned to a Worldly and Senſual Life. Nay, have they not often found, that when it has been their Misfortune to break looſe from their Duty, and ſink for ſome time into a State of Careleſneſs and Forgetfulneſs of God, and of their own Vows and Reſolutions, (as it hath ſometimes hap'ned to very good Men:) I ſay, Have they not often found that this their going backwards in Goodneſs was occaſioned purely and ſolely by the Intermiſſion of their Devotions? That there was no viſible Reaſon, or Account to be given of this their Fall, but only that through Sluggiſhneſs, or ſome other Cauſe, they have neglected to pray to God ſo earneſtly and ſo frequently as they uſed to do? I am confident a great many can

ſay

ſay this out of their own Experience. So that it concerns every Man that is at preſent in a good Diſpoſition of Mind, and hath good Hopes towards God; It concerns him as he loves his Soul; As he would not loſe all the Fruits of his paſt Labours and Endeavours in the Service of God; By all means poſſible to keep his Heart in a devout Frame: And whatever comes of it not to grow cold or languid in his Prayers; Or to omit or diſuſe them, either in publick or private, upon any pretence whatſoever.

But, *Thirdly* and *Laſtly*, to conclude all, there is this farther to be ſaid for the Encouragement of all ſorts of Perſons, to perſevere in the Practice of this Duty, namely; That whoever makes Conſcience of Saying his *Prayers* frequently and heartily, and continues ſo to do, tho' he be not *good* at the preſent, yet it is impoſſible for him long to continue *bad*. He will at laſt certainly get the Victory over all his Luſts and evil Habits, and attain to the Favour of God, and the Salvation of his own Soul. This neceſſarily follows from what hath been ſaid. A Courſe of *Prayer* and a Courſe of *Sin* cannot conſiſt together; One will neceſſarily deſtroy the other. *Praying* will either make a Man leave *Sinning*, (as a pious Man of our own uſed to ſay,) or *Sinning* will make a Man leave *Praying*. But this is to be underſtood of *Prayer* that is put up to God with great Seriouſneſs, and

and Heartineſs, and out of a Senſe of Duty and Conſcience. For as for thoſe *formal* Prayers that are made out of *Cuſtom*, or upon the account of *Education*, or for the ſerving ſome Worldly Ends of *Intereſt*, or *Reputation*, or the like; God reſpects them no more than the impertinent Tattle of Fools.

All thoſe of us therefore that mean and deſign to be *good*, though we are not ſo already; Let us above all things take care to mind our Prayers. Let us *pray* to God in *Private*. Let us *pray* to God with our *Families*. And let us join as oft as we can with the *Prayers* of the *Publick* Aſſemblies. This I am ſure is the beſt Method we can take for the reforming our Lives, and for the growing in all Vertue and Goodneſs. And the more we practiſe it, the better we ſhall like it. And if we perſevere therein we ſhall find the Comfort of it both in the *Grace* and *Aſſiſtance* we ſhall receive from the Holy Spirit, for the vanquiſhing all our Luſts and Corruptions; And in the *Bleſſings* we ſhall procure from God both to our *Selves* and our *Families*, and all our *Affairs* and *Concernments*; And, *laſtly*, in the *Everlaſting Salvation* of our Souls in the Day of the Lord Jeſus. *To whom*, &c.

FINIS.